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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 000931

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TAGS: PREL TW

SUBJECT: TAIWAN - ST. LUCIA: KICKING IT UP A NOTCH

REF: A. BRIDGETOWN 00488

1B. TAIPEI 02652

Classified By: AIT Director Stephen M. Young, Reason 1.4 (b/d)

11. (C) Summary: Taiwan Premier Su Tseng-chang on April 25 praised the Government of St. Lucia's April 24 announcement that it would establish full diplomatic relations with Taiwan as a positive development that would help Taiwan boost its diplomatic partners from 24 to 25. In the midst of a fierce battle for the DPP's presidential nomination, Su made his comments during a campaign rally and was immediately attacked by the pan-Blue media and DPP rivals for prematurely "revealing" the St. Lucia agreement for his own personal political gain ahead of the May 6 primary vote. The re-establishment of diplomatic ties with St. Lucia will be seen as a minor success for Taiwan as it tries to reverse the downward spiral in diplomatic recognitions, down to 24 from a high of 29 when President Chen took office in 2000. End Summary.

Taiwan Feels the Love...

12. (U) Taiwan Premier Su Tseng-chang praised the St. Lucia Foreign Minister's announcement on April 24 that the Government of St. Lucia intends to establish full diplomatic relations with Taiwan. Su, in the midst of a fierce battle for the Democratic Progressive Party's presidential nomination, made the comments during a campaign rally in Taoyuan County on the evening of April 25.

13. (C) Premier Su told supporters that he had "some good news" regarding Taiwan's foreign diplomatic work, pointing to the St. Lucia Foreign Minister's announcement as a positive development that could help Taiwan boost its formal diplomatic partners from 24 to 25. Su emphasized that Taiwan needs to "stand up" to ongoing efforts by China to constrain Taipei's international presence and vowed to push for entry into the United Nations under the name "Taiwan." A cabinet spokesman later said the administration welcomes St. Lucia's "sincerity and good will" and urged Foreign Ministry

officials to press ahead with the necessary work to make the formal recognition a reality.

¶14. (C) A Foreign Ministry official told AIT on April 26 that Taiwan is encouraged by St. Lucia's "positive" response to Taipei's diplomatic overtures and suggested the development was a result of Taiwan's long-standing relationship with St. Lucia Prime Minister Compton, whose government recognized Taiwan while he was in power between 1985 and 1997. The Foreign Ministry official, however, said that the Taiwan-St. Lucia deal had not been completely sealed and that details would be worked out over the next few days or weeks. According to Taiwan media, Foreign Minister James Huang said he hoped the diplomatic recognition documents could be signed within a month.

¶15. (C) Foreign Minister Huang told the Director on April 25 that his ministry still has more work to do to "nail down" the agreement, which will consist of assistance programs in health-care and agriculture. Huang declined to attach a dollar amount to Taiwan's overall package. The Director cautioned Huang that he can expect China, smarting from the loss, to redouble its efforts to isolate Taiwan. In an earlier discussion, Huang had said that he would be traveling to St. Lucia at the end of this month to finalize the agreement between Taiwan and St. Lucia.

...But Premier Could Feel the Pain

¶16. (C) Despite the welcome news for Taiwan, Premier Su was immediately attacked in the pan-Blue media and by his rivals in the DPP primary race for raising the issue at a campaign

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event. Vice President Annette Lu, who is one of the four DPP hopefults but is trailing in the polls, criticized Su for prematurely "revealing" the St. Lucia agreement in order to boost his standing ahead of the party primary vote scheduled for May 6. Lu also accused Su of trying to take personal credit for work done by the Presidential Office and the Foreign Ministry, adding that the move reflected Su's lack of understanding of foreign diplomacy and his inability to handle international affairs. Su campaign headquarters director Lan Shih-tsung, however, told AIT he expects the St. Lucia announcement to play positively for Su, but added it would not likely be a significant factor in the upcoming primary vote.

Comment: Reversing the Downward Spiral?

¶17. (C) Since President Chen Shui-bian took office in 2000 the number of Taiwan's formal diplomatic partners has dropped from 29 to 24, the latest loss being Chad in July 2006. Taiwan Foreign Ministry officials have been under pressure to stem this trend. The last Taiwan victory was in 2005 when Nauru, a South Pacific island nation of 11,000 people, switched recognition back to Taipei after having switched from Taiwan to the PRC in 2002. So far, the media here is treating this as a relatively minor story. Nonetheless, the re-establishment of diplomatic ties with St. Lucia will be a viewed as an achievement for the Chen administration and a personal victory for Foreign Minister Huang, whose performance rating centers around the battle to preserve and attract diplomatic partners.

YOUNG